Archaeological evaluation: Victoria Mill, Droylsden, Tameside

Cattell, SJ
SA 2017/77

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Archaeological Evaluation

Victoria Mill,
Droylsden,
Tameside

Planning Ref:
15/00030/OUT

Client:
De Trafford Estates Group

Technical Report:
Sarah Cattell

Report No:
SA/2017/53
Site Location: The site is bounded to the north by Manchester Road, to the east by Buckley Street, to the south by the backs of the houses on Maddison Road, and to the east by the backs of houses on Mellor Street in Droylsden, Tameside.

NGR: Centred at NGR SJ 90061 98064

Project: Victoria Mill, Droylsden, Tameside: Archaeological Evaluation

Planning Ref: 15/00030/OUT

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Summary

In March 2017, Salford Archaeology (SA) was commissioned by the De Trafford Estates Group to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land surrounding the former Victoria Mill on Buckley Street, Droylsden (centred on SJ 90061 98064). The programme of archaeological evaluation was intended to comprise the excavation of three trenches, aimed to establish the presence, extent and significance of any buried archaeological remains on the site, and was required to satisfy a condition that was attached by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council to planning consent for a proposed development (Planning Ref: 15/00030/OUT).

Victoria Mill was built in 1845 by Edmund Buckley for Henry Lees & Brothers of Manchester who specialised in the production of heavy cotton cloth. The mill originally consisted of three ranges with a private canal arm to the south, but was extended throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to include additional buildings abutting the main mill structure, a chimney stack and associated buildings to the south and a row of workers’ housing to the north. Although cotton production ceased in 1932, the mill was reopened after the war and repurposed for the manufacture of other materials before being split in the later 20th century to accommodate a number of smaller businesses.

The three evaluation trenches were located to target the remains of the chimney stack, and extension to the main mill block to the south, and the footprint of a row of workers’ housing that lies along the northern boundary of the site. Due to the land remaining in use as part of a garage, however, the area that was to be investigated by Trench 1 (the site of the mill chimney) was not available for excavation. The other two trenches were excavated in June 2017.

The trenches revealed that there was reasonable survival of the 19th- and 20th-century remains across the site. These remains were exposed at a depth of between 0.30m and 2.00m below the modern ground surface, and comprised hand-made brick features associated with the row of workers’ housing fronting onto Manchester Road, and brick and concrete structures relating to the southern extension of the mill, demolished in the 1980s.

Based on the results obtained from the evaluation, it is concluded that the structural remains exposed in the excavated trenches are not of sufficient archaeological interest to merit any further investigation.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In March 2017, Salford Archaeology (SA) was commissioned by the De Trafford Estates Group to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land surrounding Victoria Mill on Buckley Street, Droylsden. The work was carried out in order to determine the presence, extent, depth, state of preservation and significance of the archaeological resource, enabling informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains, and was required to satisfy a condition attached to planning consent for a proposed residential development (Planning Ref: 15/00030/OUT). The consented scheme allows for the demolition of existing buildings and the erection of 127 dwellings, a retail unit (use class A1/A2), a multi-functional community facility, and associated car parking and amenity space. Delivery of the design proposals will necessitate earth-moving works with a potential to damage or remove any buried archaeological remains that survive across the site.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation, compiled by Robin Holgate and Alvaro Mora-Ottomano of Archaeological Research Services Ltd in July 2016. This document was approved by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) in their capacity as Archaeological Advisor to Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, and the evaluation was undertaken in June 2017.

1.2 Location, Topography and Current Land Use

The development site comprises 1.2 hectares located in the centre of an established residential area and within Droylsden town centre boundary in Tameside, Greater Manchester (Fig 1). The site is bounded to the north by Manchester Road, to the east by Buckley Street, to the south by the backs of the houses on Maddison Road, and to the east by the backs of houses on Mellor Street (centred on SJ 90061 98064). The site lies at a height of approximately 93.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

The site comprises a partially occupied 19th-century mill building with vacant land to the north, south and west, with access from Manchester Road (Plate 1). The mill was previously sub-divided into separate industrial and retail units, although the only one to continue in use is the motor garage in the far south-western corner of the building, adjacent to the proposed location for Trench 1.

The underlying solid geology, as mapped by the British Geological Society (www.bgs.ac.uk), consists of the Collyhurst Sandstone Formation. This is overlain by superficial deposits consisting of Devensian till.
1.3 Personnel

The project was conducted by professional archaeologists from Salford Archaeology. On-site excavations were conducted by Sarah Cattell. This report was written and illustrated by Sarah Cattell. The project was managed by Ian Miller.

1.4 Monitoring

The archaeological works were monitored on behalf of Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council by Dr Andrew Myers, Senior Planning Archaeologist for GMAAS.
Figure 1: Site location
2. Historical Background

2.1 Introduction

The following narrative provides an overview of Droylsden, the local textile industry and a background to the development of Victoria Mill, some of which is drawn from the historic building investigation of the mill that was carried out prior to its demolition as a condition to planning consent for the present development (Grange 2017). The historical narrative is intended to provide a context for the results obtained from the evaluation trenching.

2.2 Origin of Droylsden’s Textile Industry

Whilst settlement at Droylsden is thought to have originated during the Early Medieval Period, the population was ‘very insignificant in number’ prior to the rise of the cotton manufacture (Higson 1859, 23). Traditionally, the local economy was based largely on agriculture, although most farmsteads incorporated a loom house for linen weaving as an auxiliary occupation (op cit, 86-7). The earliest known documentary reference to textile manufacturing in Droylsden dates to 1697, when John Woosencroft of Edge Lane earned a livelihood as a ‘linen webster’.

There were several families in the township that prepared, spun and wove fustian goods by the early 1780s, and in 1785 Robert Booth erected a three-storey building that was given over to spinning cotton on jennies. Within a couple of years, Joseph Mallalieu and a Mr Radley shared a three-storey building in Fairfield that housed machinery powered by a horse gin, representing the origins of Droylsden’s factory-based cotton industry. A ‘considerable quantity’ of fancy goods, such as spotted shawls and handkerchiefs were being woven in Droylsden by the mid-1790s, although ginghams were the principal goods produced locally.

The first steam-powered cotton mill in Droylsden was erected by Messrs Samuel Ollerenshaw & Brothers in 1831-33, and became known as Droylsden Mill. The opening of this integrated cotton spinning and weaving mill was followed in 1837 by the completion of WM Christy & Sons Fairfield Mills, situated a short distance to the north of the study area, and built to produce shirtings. In the following year, Messrs Worthington, Benson & Co laid the foundations for Droylsden Mill on land adjoining the basin where the Hollingwood Branch Canal joined the main line of the Manchester and Ashton-under-Lyne Canal (Plate 2). Weaving in this mill commenced on February 1839, with throstle and mule spinning following later in that year (Higson 1859, 99).

The other large spinning mills in Droylsden were Albion Mill, Victoria Mill, Royal Mill, Edge Lane Mill, Angola Mill, Lumb Mill (Littlemoss), Oakfield Mill and Saxon Mill, the last mill to be built in Droylsden in 1906.
2.3 Background to Victoria Mill

In July 1845, Edmund Buckley began to construct Victoria Mill for Henry Lees & Brothers of Manchester, but retained ownership of the building. This integrated spinning and weaving mill was well placed to take advantage of the newly established transport links nearby, with the Manchester Road turnpike to the north and the canal to the south, complete with a private arm to serve the mill directly. The mill went into production in March 1847. In 1850, Buckley built another mill, a weaving shed known as Angola Mill, adjacent to the canal basin and linked to the Manchester Road turnpike by the newly opened Buckley Street (Haynes 2004, 7). Angola Mill was put in full production in January 1851 by Messrs Kay, Richardson & Wroe (Higson 1859, 99).

Henry Lees & Brothers specialised in producing heavy domestic cloth, such as table cloths, which they had been producing at their mill at Cromford Court, Manchester, and continued to produce such cloths when they expanded to Victoria Mill. The company was owned by Henry Lees and his brothers James and Edward, but Edward left during the 1860s, to be replaced by John Kenworthy, who also owned a firm of carriers. Henry Lees retired in 1870, and both James Lees and John Kenworthy left the company during the 1870s, leaving the company in the control of Frederick Preston Lees, James’ son. Following a severe depression in the cotton industry, the company went into liquidation in 1879 with liabilities of £40,000, and the legal documents recount that at this time Victoria Mill housed 13,000 throstle spindles and 10,000 mule weft spindles, and was producing some 40,000lbs of yarns each week. The yarns were weaved into heavy domestic cloths on 330 looms, many of which were housed in a weaving shed which had been added to the mill in 1867 (Haynes 2004, 48-9).
In 1879 the Mill was taken over by the Victoria Spinning Company, which was owned by John Holt and his son Frank and concentrated on cotton spinning, removing the powerlooms and introducing ring-spinning frames. The mill housed 44,500 spindles by 1891 (Worrall 1891), although the Company ceased trading in that year, and the mill was taken over briefly by the Atlas Spinning Co, who sold the company to Joseph Byrom & Sons in 1893 (Haynes, 2004). The Byroms continued to produce twist and weft yarns, and converted the mill from steam to electrical driving in 1910, using 20 motors with a combined power totalling 1.357 hp.

Victoria Mill finally closed in 1932 during the inter-war depression and was not used as a cotton mill again, but repurposed to accommodate a number of other businesses. The mill became multi-occupation with various smaller companies occupying the surviving three floors in the mid- to late 20th century.
2.4 Background to 71-97 Manchester Road

The population of Droylsden in 1831 was 3,000, but had risen to 8,000 by 1861 as a result of industrial expansion, particularly the growth in the textile industry. The local population continued to expand during the second half of the 19th century, reaching a total of approximately 11,000 in 1900. The growth created a demand for new housing.

The former houses along the northern edge of the development site, 71-97 Manchester Road, are first shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1894, which depicts a terrace of 14 double-depth dwellings, all with small outshuts and yards to the rear. The footprint of the houses remains unchanged on subsequent editions of Ordnance Survey mapping, and they were demolished between 1973-82.

Plate 4: Aerial view across Fairfield Mills in 1949, with arrow marking the rear of the 71-97 Manchester Road
3. Methodology

3.1 Excavation Methodology

Before excavation, the client provided Salford Archaeology with service plans for the site and all trenches and surrounding areas were scanned with an appropriate instrument to ensure that no live cables would be disturbed during the programme of works. The trenches were excavated using a tracked mechanical excavator with a 1.80m wide toothless ditching bucket down to archaeological features or natural geology. On occasions, a 0.60m wide bucket was used to excavate out narrower areas. The machine excavation was supervised by a professional archaeologist at all times. The locations of the trenches are shown on the trench location plan (Fig 2), although Trench 1 could not be excavated due to the land remaining in use as part of a garage.

The evaluation trenches were placed across the study area in order to determine the presence, extent, depth and state of preservation of the remains identified in the light of the results obtained from the historic building investigation (Grange 2017). Some leeway was allowed for movement of the trenches from the original marked positions due to services and terrain features.

Where depth allowed further excavations proceeded by hand. In any excavations deemed too deep to enter cleaning was carried out by machine.

Excavated spoil was placed in specified areas, at least 1m away from trench edges.

3.2 Recording Methodology

Separate contexts were recorded individually on Salford Archaeology (SA) pro-forma trench sheets. All trenches were recorded either digitally using a total station theodolite or by hand, whichever was deemed most appropriate.

Photography of all relevant phases and features were undertaken in digital format. General working photographs were taken during the archaeological works, to provide illustrative material covering the wider aspects of the archaeological work undertaken.

All fieldwork and recording of archaeological features, deposits and artefacts were carried out to acceptable archaeological standards. All archaeological works carried out by SA are carried out to the standards set out in the Code of Conduct of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.
Figure 2: Proposed trench location plan (Holgate and Mora-Ottomano 2016)
4. Evaluation Results

4.1 Introduction
The ground surface across the study area was characterised by tarmac hard standing, forming the surface of the car park. Below the tarmac was a levelling layer of mixed demolition rubble and gravel hardcore, presumably resulting from the re-laying of the car park on the land surrounding the mill. Where observed, the natural geology comprised firm yellow silty clay.

The following narrative presents the results obtained from the excavation of Trenches 2 and 3. Trench 1 was not excavated, as the area is still occupied by an extant building.

4.2 Trench 2
Trench 2 was located along the northern edge of the site, across the footprint of Nos 79-91 Manchester Road. It was aligned east/west and measured 20.50 x 1.8m, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.50m (Plates 5 and 6).

Plate 5: Trench 2 general shot, looking east
Plate 6: Trench 2 general shot, looking west
The trench was overlain by a 0.25m thick layer of compact tarmac and stone chippings (001), which overlay up to 0.35m of demolition rubble levelling material (002). Below this, several features associated with the terraced workers’ housing which formerly occupied the site were identified.

At the far western end of the trench a small section of flagstone floor (003) was revealed extending beyond the trench edges to the north, south and west (Plate 7). This abutted to the east a single-course wall (004), composed of hand-made bricks laid in stretchers and bonded with lime-based mortar. The wall was 0.11m wide, and aligned north/south. This was abutted to the east by a level area of concrete (006), extending 1.50m eastwards which had been laid around a rectangular brick feature (005) that was too badly degraded to identify its purpose. This feature measured 0.75 x 0.70m, and was composed of a black gritty clinker-rich deposit surrounded by the remains of a single course of crushed and fragmented bricks. To the east of concrete 006 lay a second flagstone surface (007), which measured 0.60m wide and comprised four stones, the southernmost of which had a square cut that continued south beyond the edge of the excavated trench. A second hand-made brick wall (008) was identified lying against 007, which was constructed from a single course of partially degraded bricks laid as stretchers with white mortar, aligned north/south (Plate 8). The wall had been constructed directly on top of a deposit of light grey sandy clay with moderate inclusions of brick, stone and mortar fragments 009, which extended 2.50m eastwards.
Wall 010 was revealed in the north-facing section of the trench, and was constructed from hand-made bricks laid with lime-based mortar. The wall survived to a height of three courses, equating to a height of 0.34m (Plate 9), although no foundation cut was observed. On the eastern side of deposit 009 lay a third north/south-aligned wall that was composed of hand-made bricks (011), which was almost identical to wall 008 but in a marginally less degraded state (Plate 10).
Levelling material 002 was identified across a large area to the east of wall 011, which continued for 4.50m eastwards before a second east/west-aligned wall was encountered. This wall, 013, was constructed from hand-made bricks, and was two courses wide (0.24m) and four courses high (0.38m). The wall was contained within a foundation trench (026) that was filled with a dark grey sandy clay (027) and cut into the natural clay geology (012; Plate 11).

Approximately 1.10m to the east of wall 013 lay another flagstone surface (014), which measured 1.50m wide and continued beyond the trench edges to the north and south. This was abutted to the east by a single-course wall (015), which was composed of hand-made bricks and laid as stretchers; again, the bricks in this wall were moderately degraded (Plate 12). Wall 015 was, in turn, abutted to the south by a fourth flagstone surface (016), which was similar in form to the area represented by surfaces 006 and 007 with rectangular voids to the north and south. Lying against 015 and within 016 lay a 0.70 x 0.80m area of a gritty blackish-brown deposit (028), similar to 005 but without any evidence of a brick structure enclosing it.

As with 006, the flagstones forming surface 016 were laid around this area rather than it having been cut through the surface. A second feature within 016 was a square ceramic drain measuring 0.30 x 0.30m, lying on the far eastern side of the surface and abutting wall 017 (Plate 13). This wall formed the eastern boundary of surface 016 and was constructed from two courses of hand-made bricks laid in headers with a width of 0.24m. Again, the bricks were partially degraded and the wall had slipped slightly to the east, into the natural clay geology (012) that the wall was constructed on (Plate 14).
Plate 11: Wall 013, looking south

Plate 12: Wall 015 showing flagstone surfaces 014 and 016 to the west and east respectively, looking south

Plate 13: Ceramic drain within 016, looking east
The final feature to be identified in this trench was a second east/west-aligned wall (018), which abutted wall 017 to the west, and continued beyond the edge of the trench to the east (Plate 15). The wall measured 0.24 x 2.10m, and survived to a height of 0.71m. It was constructed from hand-made bricks, and had been laid directly onto natural clay 012.
4.3 Trench 3

This trench was located on the southern side of the mill, and across the footprint of the southern extension that had been demolished in the 1980s. It was aligned east/west, measured 24 x 1.50m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 2m (Plate 16). The trench was overlain by a 0.30m thick layer of compact tarmac and stone chippings (019), which lay above up to 0.25m of demolition rubble levelling material 020.

The majority of the central part of the trench was dominated by a layer of reinforced concrete (023), which extended 19.50m east/west and was 0.25m thick (Plate 17). Set within this were several iron rails, c 0.05m in diameter, which ran both north/south and east/west across the deposit and were hourglass shaped in cross-section. The concrete was broken in two places where the rails appeared to be grouped to reveal a compact deposit of crushed brick, concrete and mortar fragments 024 which lay below concrete 023 (Plate 18).
Towards the eastern end of 023, the concrete was laid over an L-shaped hand-made brick wall (022) that measured 1.40m north/south and 0.45m east/west. The wall stood to a height of 1.00m, and was laid in English Garden Wall bond with a top course of headers laid on edge (Plate 19). To the south of this wall the concrete overlying it continued southwards beyond the trench edge to span a void filled by demolition rubble (020). To the east of wall 022 a small surface composed of hand-made bricks (021), which was identified at a depth of 1.30m below the existing ground surface, although this feature could not be investigated further due to health and safety concerns with the surrounding demolition deposit.

Abutting the degraded western extent of the concrete surface 023 lay an uneven cobbled surface (025), which extended beyond the trench edges to the north, south and west. The surface was composed of stone setts in varying sizes between 0.10m-0.25m with the larger stones to the north (Plate 20).
Plate 19: Wall 022 with surface 021 in the foreground, looking west

Plate 20: Cobbled surface 025, looking west
5. Discussion

5.1 Structural Remains

The archaeological evaluation revealed that buried structural remains survive in-situ in both trenches. The majority of these remains were of a mid- to late 19th- or early 20th-century date, and represented the use of the site for textile manufacturing, with residential use along the northern boundary.

Remains relating to the mid- to late 19th-century workers’ housing, as depicted on the Ordnance Survey mapping of 1894-1973, were uncovered in Trench 2. The remains clearly represent the foundations of double-depth houses fronting onto Manchester Road, with the repeating pattern of single-course brick walls and flagstone and concrete surfaces likely to represent the yards to the rear of these properties. The two larger east/west-aligned walls also correspond in both size and position, and are likely to be the rear walls of the houses. Neither the historic mapping nor the evidence uncovered during the evaluation suggests that these buildings were cellared. Following their construction, the buildings underwent very little alteration during their occupation with only superficial changes made, such as the relaying of a yard in concrete.

The row comprised 14 mirrored double-depth houses with outshuts, each with a small toilet and yard to the rear. This type of housing was very common across the Manchester region from the mid-19th century onwards, and was a way to construct double-depth houses with yards on smaller plots. This row, and the three rows to the east of Buckley Street, were smaller than those fronting onto Manchester Road to the west of the mill, which followed a repeating rather than mirrored pattern with larger yards. The main centre of Droylsden developed to the north-east and the mix and range of terraces along this western spur suggests that this housing was not part of a comprehensive town plan, but rather constructed to keep up with housing demands as and when needed. Although the exact date of construction is not known for the terraces excavated, it is likely they were built by Edmund Buckley sometime after 1845 for the workers in any of the three mills occupying his land around the Manchester and Ashton Canal Basin.

The remains uncovered in Trench 3 appeared to relate to the southern extension of the main mill building and the small free-standing structure to the west. The main extension was originally 15 x 15m in size, separated by a 2m-wide corridor between this and the main mill, with the small structure lying 8m to the west. By the 1960s, the main extension had been reconfigured to abut both the mill to the north and the smaller building to the west, although this westerly extension was narrower than the earlier extension. The concrete surface revealed is likely to be associated with this later layout and the wall seen below this surface to the east corresponds well with the western wall of the pre-1960s extension. It is therefore likely that the structures in this trench relate to the 19th- and early 20th-century occupation of the mill, and that the concrete was laid to create a level surface for machinery associated with the iron rails in use during the later 20th-century occupation.
The earliest depiction of the mill is on the tithe map of 1847, which was drawn shortly after the completion of the building, but does not show the small structure to the rear of the mill. This is first seen on the OS mapping of 1894, when the mill had several additional ranges added to link the original three main structures. It has been suggested that due to the expansion of the mill, and the implied increase in production, the small structure to the rear of the main building may have been an engine house (Grange 2017). If this is indeed the case, the change of use suggested by the archaeological evaluation evidence would coincide with the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century decline of cotton production and the repurposing of the mill for other manufacturing processes.

The evaluation revealed evidence of three broad phases of occupation on the site, which can be summarised as follows:

\textit{Phase 1}

This phase relates to the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century occupation of the site between 1850 and 1900, and is represented by the brick and stone remains of the workers’ housing which was first seen on the 1894 OS map, and by the fragmentary brick walls and floor of the southern extension to the mill. It is not known exactly when this extension was added to the mill, but it is possible that if it did house the mill’s engine and boiler house it may have been added in 1867 when the single-storey weaving shed was built and the need for power increased. However, the evaluation did not provide any firm evidence that the building had been intended to house the mill’s steam-power plant.

\textit{Phase 2}

The second phase of occupation is associated with the later 20\textsuperscript{th}-century remains to the south of the mill, and relates to the reconfiguring of the mill extension. If these structures were indeed used to house the mills power systems in the later 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, it is likely that when the mill use changed to multiple occupancy prior to the 1970s, the potential of these buildings as new working spaces was seen. As a result, the extension was widened to abut the mill and the north-western corner demolished to create a long, narrow, range against the smaller building. Again, there is no evidence to suggest exactly when this reconfiguring took place, but it is likely to have been during the 1950s either by AS Sherr Ltd, when they took the mill over for the production of hair for furniture manufacture, or soon after when other companies began to use other parts of the mill.

\textit{Phase 3}

The final phase of activity identified on the site and dates to the late 1970s - early 1980s, when the workers’ housing along the Manchester Road frontage, and the southern extension to the mill were demolished. Both areas were then remediated and used as car parks.
6. Conclusion

The evaluation demonstrated that buried structural remains relating to mid- to late 19th-century workers’ housing and late additions to Victoria Mill survive in-situ across the site. Based on the results obtained from the evaluation, however, it is concluded that the structural remains exposed in the excavated trenches are not of sufficient archaeological interest to merit any further investigation.
7. Archive

The archive comprises of digital drawings, survey data and digital photographs. This archive is currently held by Salford Archaeology.

A copy of this report will be deposited with the Greater Manchester Sites and Monuments Record, held by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) at the University of Salford.
8. Acknowledgments

Salford Archaeology would like to thank Gleeds Management Services Ltd, acting on behalf of DeTrafford Estates Group, for commissioning the archaeological works, and in particular Darren Lewis for his help and support throughout the project. SA would also like to thank Dr Andrew Myers for providing monitoring support and advice through GMAAS. The on-site excavations were conducted by Sarah Cattell. This report was written and compiled by Sarah Cattell. The report was illustrated by Richard Ker.
9. Sources

Cartographic Sources
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Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1: Location map
Figure 2: Proposed trench location plan (Holgate and Mora-Ottomano 2016)
Figure 3: Trench locations superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1848
Figure 4: Trench locations superimposed on the Ordnance Survey map of 1894
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Figure 6: Plan of the excavated remains exposed in Trench 2
Figure 7: Plan of the excavated remains exposed in Trench 3
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Figure 6: Plan of the excavated remains exposed in Trench 2
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